

My Lady of the North

THE LOVE STORY OF
A GRAY JACKET
By RANDALL PARRISH
AUTHOR OF
"WHEN WILDERNESS WAS KING"
Illustrations by Arthur T. Williamson
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SYNOPSIS.

The story opens in a Confederate tent at a critical stage of the Civil War. Gen. Lee imparts to Capt. Wayne an important message to Longstreet. Accompanied by Sergt. Craig, an old army scout, Wayne starts on his mission. They get within the lines of the enemy and in the darkness Wayne is taken for a Federal officer and a young lady on horseback is given the role of a messenger. She is a girl and attempts to escape. One of the horses succumbs and Craig goes through with the dispatches, while Wayne and the lady of the North escape. They are pursued by the enemy and enter a cave in the dark a huge mastiff attacks Wayne. The girl shoots the brute just in time. Wayne in disguise penetrates to the ball-room beneath which he had been imprisoned. He is introduced to a Miss Minor and barely escapes being unmasked. Edith Brennan, recognizing Wayne, says she will save him. Securing a pass through the lines, they are confronted by Brennan, who is knocked senseless. Edith, Edith, Edith, Wayne makes a dash for liberty. He encounters Bungay; they reach the Lee camp and are sent with reinforcements to join Early. In the battle of Shenandoah the regiment is overwhelmed, and Wayne, with in the hospital, is visited by Edith Brennan. Wayne and Bungay are sent on a scouting detail, and arriving at a mountain place, Wayne meets Miss Minor and Mrs. Bungay, and later Edith appears.

CHAPTER XXVIII.—Continued.

"I say, Cap," he said, jerking the words out to the mule's hard trot, and grasping his saddle pommel desperately, "I sorter reckon as how ther'll be some fun back ther afore long 'less all signs fail."

"Why?" I stared at him, now thoroughly aroused to the thought that he had important news to communicate.

"Wal," he explained slowly, "whin ye wait off, I sorter tuk a notion ter look 'bout a bit. Used ter be an ol' stompin' ground o' mine. So Dutchy an' me clumb thet big hill back o' whar we halted, and by gum, down ther in ther gully on t' other side thar's a durned big camp o' fellers."

I reined up short, and with uplifted hand signalled the men behind to halt.

"Why didn't you tell me this before?" I questioned sternly. "How many were there? and what did they look like?"

He scratched the back of his head thoughtfully, and answered with careful deliberation. "Durn it, I didn't jine ye till after y'd started, an' I reckon as how it took me all o' tew mile ter git this yere blame muel up ter whar I cud talk. Thar's quite a smart bunch, but they had some pickets out, an' I cudn't git close 'nough ter tell zackly. Dutchy thought ther was nigh onter two hundred o' 'em, but I jist don't know. They wasn't dressed like sojers o' either army, an' I reckon they're out o' ther bills."

I glanced at my little handul of men, scarcely knowing what decision it might be wise to make. Undoubtedly they would fight if occasion arose, but the odds were terribly heavy; besides, if Brennan came, and his party got away that same evening, as was planned for them to do, then it might not be necessary for us to strike a blow. I was certainly in no mood to expose my small command merely to save the empty house from destruction.

"Ebers," I said, turning toward the Sergeant, who sat his horse with expressionless face, "you were with the guide when he discovered this camp. How many do you think it contained? and who were they?"

"Vel, dere vos more as two companies, Captain, and dere vos some horses, but dey vos dressed—vot you calls it?—all ober not ner same."

"Not in uniform?"

"Dot vos it."

"Have any of the rest of you seen anything that looked suspicious?" I asked, glancing around into the different faces.

"Maybe I did," answered one of the troopers named Earl. "As we rode up the first hill after leaving the house my horse picked up a stone, and I had to stop and get it out. I reckon I tell behind a quarter of a mile or more, and just as I started I looked back, and a party of ten or twelve fellows was just riding in through them big gates onto the front lawn. But them fellows was soldiers for sure; they rode regular like, and all of them wore caps. It was so far off I couldn't tell the color of their clothes, but them caps made me think they was Feds."

I chose my course at once. This undoubtedly must have been Brennan's party.

closed down about us it proved to be an exceedingly black one, although the skies were clear. Sleep was an impossibility for me, as my mind was in constant turmoil.

Ebers was lying next me upon the grass, solemnly puffing at his huge pipe, and I held my watch to the glow in its bowl in order to see the time. It was nearly midnight.

"Those fellows ought to be at it before this," I said to him, "if they intend to accomplish anything to-night."

"I think so too," he answered slowly. "I will see dot der guard is all right, an' den vill get some sleep, for I am pretty much done out already."

He arose ponderously to his feet, and stretched out his short arms in a prodigious yawn. As he stood there, his pudgy figure outlined against the sky, there was borne to our ear the sound of a furious struggle on hilltop to the south—a shout, blows, a volley of cursing, then silence. An instant later we were both running through the darkness toward the scene of trouble.

"What is it, Sands?" I questioned breathlessly, as I came suddenly upon the little group.

"A feller on horseback," was the answer. "He come up on us like a streak out o' thet black holler, an' he'd a sure got away of Mason hedn't clubbed him with his gun. I've got the cuss safe collared now."

"Who are you?" I asked sternly, striving in vain to see something of him through the darkness. "Where were you riding?"

I had scarcely spoken when our prisoner thrust Sands roughly aside and took one hasty step toward me.

"My God, Wayne! Is it possible this is you?" he cried excitedly.

"Caton?" I exclaimed, as surprised as himself. "Caton? What is it? What is wrong. Are you from the Minor house? Has it been attacked?"

"Yes," he answered, panting yet from his exertion and excitement. "We were to start North with the ladies at nine o'clock, but the house

was surrounded as soon as it became dark. Those devils supposed it to be unguarded, and advanced without precautions. We fired and drove them back. He had repulsed three attacks when I left at eleven, but three of our men were already hit."

"You were after aid?"

"I was striving to reach our advance pickets at McMillan. It seemed the only possible chance, and none of the men would volunteer to make the ride. One was killed trying it before I started. God knows how I hated to leave them, but it had to be done. How many have you?"

"Only twenty; but if we could once get inside along with your fellows, we might hold the house until reinforcements came."

"Thank God! I knew you would!" he cried joyfully, grasping me again fervently by the hand. "You are not one to hesitate over the color of a uniform at such a time as this. Only, Wayne," and he hesitated an instant, "it is right I should tell you that Brennan is there, and in command."

"I know it, but those women must be saved nevertheless," I answered firmly, my mind settled. "This is no time for personal quarreling, and

whatever color of cloth we wear those outlaws are our common enemies, to be hunted down like wild beasts. I have seen specimens of their fiendish cruelty that make my blood run cold to remember. The very thought of those who are now exposed falling into such hands is enough to craze one; death would be preferable a thousand times. How many fighting men have you?"

"Seven fit for duty."

"Will you ride forward, or go back with us?"

"We must send word"—and the gallant fellow's voice shook—"but God knows, Wayne, I want to go back. If we both live I am to marry Celia Minor."

"I understand," I said gravely. "Ebers, who is your best rider?"

"It was dot funny leetle fellow Glen, Captain."

"Glen, come here."

The trooper, a mere boy, with freckled face and great honest gray eyes, but wiry and tough as steel, pushed his way through the group and faced me.

"Glen," I said, "your Sergeant tells me you are the best rider in the troop. I am going to intrust you with the most important duty of all. The lives of every one of us and of four helpless women depend entirely upon your riding. You take two horses, kill both if necessary, but stop for nothing until your duty is done. You are to carry a note from me, and another from this gentleman, who is an officer in the Federal army, and deliver them both to the commandant of the first military post you find. Insist upon reaching him in person. It makes no difference which army the post belongs to, for this is a matter of humanity. The Federal outpost at McMillan is the nearest to us; make for there. You understand?"

The boy saluted gravely, all mischief gone from his face.

"I do, sir," he said. "But I'd a darn sight rather stay here and fight."

"You will be back in plenty of time to take a hand, my lad. Now, men"—and I turned to the dark, expectant ring about me—"this is no ordinary duty of your enlistment, and I wish no one to accompany me tonight who does not volunteer for the service. Seven Federal soldiers and four women, three of them Virginians, are attacked at the house we have just left by a large party of bushwhacking guerrillas, the offscourings of hell. Every one of you knows what that means. Will you go with me to their rescue?"

No one seemed anxious to be first to speak. I could see them look aside uneasily at one another.

"Bungay," I said, "I feel sure you will go, for your wife is there."

"Marlar?"

"Yes; Miss Minor told me this afternoon, but I had forgotten to mention it."

The little man sprang into the air and came down with a whoop.

"The bloody devils!" he cried excitedly. "Ye bet I'll go."

"Come, Sergeant, speak up; what do you men say?"

"I like not to fight mit der Yankees," he admitted candidly, "but der vomens, y' Chiminy, dot vos anoder ting. I vill go, Captain; mein Gott, yaw."

"We're with you, sir," spoke voice after voice gravely around the dark circle, and then Sands added: "We'll show them that Yanks how the Johnny Rebs kin fight, sir."

Ten minutes later Glen, bearing his two messages to the Blue and Gray, was speedily recklessly through the black night northward, while my little squad was moving cautiously back over the road we had so lately traversed.

CHAPTER XXIX.

A Mission for Beelzebub.

As we picked our way slowly forward through the gloom I gleaned from Caton all he knew regarding the

situation before us. My own knowledge of the environments of the Minor house helped me greatly to appreciate the difficulties to be surmounted. He had succeeded in his escape by dodging among the negro cabins where the attacking line appeared weakest, but expressed the conviction that even this slight gap would be securely closed long before we reached there.

"Have they sufficient men, then, to cover thoroughly all four sides?" I asked.

"To the best of my judgment, there must be fully two hundred and fifty in the gang, and apparently they operate under strict military discipline. It is a revelation to me, Wayne, of the growing power of these desperate fellows. I knew they were becoming numerous and bold, but this surpasses anything I could imagine. More, they are being constantly recruited by new arrivals. A party of at least a dozen came in while I was hiding behind the stables. I heard them asking for the leader."

"What did they call him?"

"Lory, or Laurie, or something like that. They claimed to be deserters from Lee's army, but two or three of them wore our uniforms."

"It's Red Lowrie," I said gravely, more impressed than ever with the seriousness of the situation. "I heard of him two years ago—he killed a man in the Sixth North Carolina, and took to the hills. Since then he has developed into quite a leader for such scum, and has proven himself a merciless monster. You have no suggestion to offer as to how we had better attempt to get in?"

He shook his head despondently.

"What station does Brennan defend?" I asked.

"The front of the house; the main point of attack has been there."

We could distinguish the sound of firing by this time, and its continuous volume convinced me that Caton's estimate of the number engaged was not greatly overdrawn. As we topped the summit of the hill a great burst of red fire leaped suddenly high into the sky.

"Great God, Wayne! we are too late!" he cried wildly. "Those devils have fired the house."

With fiercely throbbing heart I gazed down at the flames far below in the black valley.

"No," I said with eager relief. "It is the stable which is ablaze. See, the light falls full upon the white side of the house. Thank Heaven, we are not too late."

As I sat my horse there, gazing down upon that scene of black rapine, unwilling to venture into its midst until I could formulate some definite plan of action, fully a dozen wild schemes thronged into my brain, only to be cast aside, one after another, as thoroughly impracticable.

"We shall have to make a dash for it, and trust in God," said Caton, guessing at my dilemma.

"No," I answered firmly, "there would be no possibility of success in such a course. Those fellows are old hands, and have pickets out. See, Caton, that is certainly a picket-line yonder where the road dips. Every man of us would be shot down before we penetrated those guard lines and attained the house. We have got to reach their inner line some way through strategy, and even then must risk being fired upon by our own people before we get within cover."

Even as I was speaking I evolved a plan of action—desperate it certainly was, yet nothing better occurred to me, and time was golden.

"Ebers," I said, "didn't I see an extra jacket strapped back of your saddle?"

"It is no good," he protested vehemently. "It vos for der rain come."

"All right; hand it over to the Lieutenant here. Caton, throw that uniform coat of yours into the ditch and don honest gray for once. Sands, come here. Take your knife and cut away every symbol of rank on my jacket; tear it off, any way you can."

In another moment these necessary changes had been accomplished.

"Now," I ordered, "pile your sabers there with mine beside the road; then hobble your horses, all but the mule; I shall want him."

"Does we go der rest of der vay on foot?" questioned the Sergeant, anxiously.

"Certainly; and I desire you to remember one important thing: let me do the talking, but if any of you are asked questions, we are deserters from Hill's corps, tired of the war."

"Mein Gott!" muttered the German, disconsolately. "I hope it vos not long off, Captain; I am no good on foot in der dark, by Chiminy."

"You had better manage to keep up tonight, unless you are seeking to commit suicide. Now, men, mark me carefully! Load your carbines. Are you all ready? Sergeant, see that each man has his gun properly charged and capped. You are to carry your arms as thoroughly concealed as possible; keep close to me always; obey my orders instantly, and to the letter. We are but twenty men pitted against over two hundred, remember, and when we strike, it must be both quick and hard."

I mounted the mule, counted the dim figures in the darkness, and then gave the order to march. As we moved slowly down the hill I was aware that Caton walked upon one side of me, while Bungay plodded along upon the other; but my mind was so filled with the excitement of our adventure and all that depended upon its successful culmination, as scarcely to realize anything other than the part I must personally play. Good fortune and audacity alone could combine to win the game we were now engaged upon.

A tall heavily bearded mountaineer stood squarely in the middle of the road to the north of the picket-line.

"I make make out but little of him as the light shows, excepting that he wore a high conical cap and bore a long rifle."

"Stop right thar!" he called out hoarsely, upon hearing us. "Who are you uns?"

As he challenged, a dozen others sprang up from about the flame and, guns in hand, came toward us on a run.

"We uns are doggoned tired o' soldierin', an' a gittin' nuthin' fer it," I said in the slow Southern drawl, "an' wanner jine yer gaug, pervidin' thar's any show fer it."

"How many are ye?" asked one of the newcomers, striding forward between us and the sentry.

"A right smart heap o' a bunch; bin a pickin' o' 'em up ever since we left Charlotte," I returned evasively.

"They be dandies ter fight, an' I reckon as how ye kin use 'em, can't ye?"

"Maybe; who did ye want ter see?"

"Wal, they sed as how a feller named Lowrie was a runnin' this yere gang, an' if thet's thar way o' it, I reckon as how it's Lowrie we're after. Be you Lowrie?"

"Naw."

The answer was so gruff and short, and the fellow hesitated so long in adding anything to it, I began to think it was all off.

"Wal," he consented to say at last, ungraciously, "thar's a blame pile o' "

"That Feller Thar Is Captain Wayne, o' My Ol' Reg'ment."

ye kin in lately, an' I calculate we got 'bout 'nough fer our business, but I reckon as how Red will use ye somehow. Anyhow you uns kin come 'long with me an' find out, but ye'll diskitver him 'bout ther orpenter man jist now ever ye run up again. He's plum mad, Red is, fer sartain."

He turned and strode off, without so much as giving us a backward glance, and with a hearty congratulatory kick to the mule, I and my company followed him. A hundred yards further in we passed through the fringe of trees and emerged into an open space from whence we could see plainly the great white house still illumined by the flames which continued to consume the stables. Shots were flashing like fireflies out of the darkness on every side of us, the smell of burning powder scented the air, and I could distinguish the black forms of men lying prone on the grass in something resembling a skirmish line.

"Makin' a fight o' it, ain't they?" I asked of our taciturn guide, as we picked our way carefully among the recumbent forms.

"Damn 'em, yes, a hell o' a fight," he admitted bitterly.

Just beyond musket-shot from the house, and nearly opposite the front entrance, quite a group of men were standing beneath the black shadows of a grove of trees. In spite of the gleam from the fire I could make little of them, but as we approached from the direction of the rear, one of them exclaimed suddenly:

"Who comes thar? What body o' men is thet?"

"It's 'nother party o' deserters, as wants ter jine us," said the guide, sourly. "They's Johnnies from Lee's army."

"Oh, they dew, dew they? Who's ther boss o' this yere crowd?"

I swung down from my seat on the mule's back, and stood facing him, as he advanced.

"We uns hain't got no boss," I answered, "but they sorter fell in ahind o' me 'cause I was astraddle o' this muel. Be you named Lowrie?"

"I reckon; I'm Red Lowrie," prondly o' me, an' if ye hev, ye know ye've got ter step damn lively whin I howl. What was ye in ther army?"

"Corporal."

The flames of the burning barn leaped suddenly upward, as if fed by some fresh combustion, and flung a brighter glare over the rough faces clustered about us. I saw Red Lowrie plainly enough now, as he peered eagerly forward to scan my face, a heavy-set, coarse-featured man, with prominent nose, and thick, matted red beard. He wore a wide-brimmed soft army hat, under which his eyes shone maliciously, and he grasped a long rifle in one big, hairy hand. As I gazed at him curiously, some one hastily pushed a way through the group at his back, and the next instant a tall figure stood at his side. I recognized the newcomer at a single glance, and for the moment my heart fairly choked me—it was Craig.

"Lowrie," he said, pointing straight at me, "thar's somethin' wrong yere. That feller thar is Captain Wayne, o' my ol' reg'ment."

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

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NOT MRS. NAGGITT.



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Mrs. Naggitt—Why so?

Mr. Naggitt—You would never have accepted that whole story as an excuse for staying away from home for three days and nights.

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"Och, my Dennis always was quick on his feet," said Mrs. Flynn, with a proud shake of her head.

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